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ATTEMPT

Towards rendering of

Private Christians

Helpful to their

MINISTERS,

And Useful in the

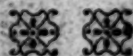
Religious Societies

To which they belong.

Intended for the Reviving and Promoting of
RELIGION.

By D. GOODRICH.

*That we might be Fellow-Helpers to the Truth, 3 Joh.v.8.
And Jonathan strengthened his Hand in God, 1 Sam,
xxiii. 16.*



L O N D O N,

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ATTEMPT

Private Christians

MINISTERS

Societies



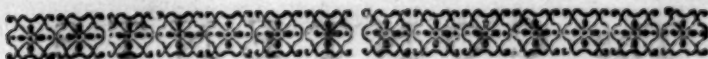
Travelling for the Reviving and Promoting of

Religion

B. D. GOODRICH

Author of "The Christian's Duty" and "The Christian's Life"

Published by the American Board of Christian Missions, No. 10, South Street, New York.



THE P R E F A C E.

HELP and Assistance from our People, is a Thing greatly desired and wished for amongst Ministers; and the Want of it is generally felt and complained of. And therefore what is here humbly offered to the Friends and Lovers of Religion and Godliness, to those who are mourning over the Degeneracy of the Times, and are imploying their Thoughts on every side, how to bring Things into a better State and Condition, is this; the Part which belongs to private Christians, as their proper Share of Service, in the Business of encouraging and promoting Religion. The Performance is calculated for as general Use amongst Christians as a Thing of this Nature would well admit of. And if any Thing at the first View should appear not so acceptable to some, I would bespeak the Candor and Patience of such to hear, and weigh the Matter again in their own Thoughts: However, the Main of what is here offered will be allowed not only to be agreeable to my Design, but to be of standing Importance. An accurate and curious Reader, I am sensible, may not easily relish some seeming Repetitions; but for this I have only to say, that the Whole is chiefly intended for the Practice of private Christians; and when the same Things are brought over again, they are used and applied to a different End and Purpose. I must also desire of the Reader, who consults the Profit and Advantage designed him herein, carefully to take Notice of the Hints and Intimations almost every where suggested, concerning the practical and prudential Part of the Scheme recommended.

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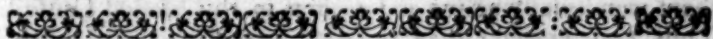
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INTRODUCTION.



HE Growth of *Infidelity* is the present Complaint of Multitudes amongst us. And the great Declension among professing Christians, as to serious, powerful Godliness, is Matter of equal, if not greater Lamentation with the truly Pious in the Land.

The Causes of such a general *Decay* have been enquired after, that the Occasions of it might be removed by the Blessing of God: The Duty of Ministers to this Purpose, both with regard to their Preaching and Conduct, has been excellently well stated and inforc'd in some Discourses lately published. But as to the Business before us, of Christians being helpful to their *Ministers*, and useful in the *Congregations* and *Churches* they belong to, I know of nothing that has been written professedly to set these Things in a particular and distinct View.

If we look into the earliest, purest, and best Days of Christianity, we shall find, that not only the *Apostles* and Ministers of *Christ* were diligently concerned in promoting

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the Gospel, in the Knowledge, Love and blessed Fruits of it, but the Christians in their more private Places and Stations were active and zealous in the same Cause. Some eminently useful this way are marked out as *Helpers* of the *Apostles*. Thus *Paul* greets *Aquila* and *Priscilla*, as his *Helpers in Christ Jesus*, Rom. xvi. 3. He makes particular mention of some *Women* that *laboured with him in the Gospel*, Phil. iv. 3. and directs *Titus* to put the aged *Women* upon *teaching* and instructing the younger in their Christian Behaviour and Conduct, that Enemies might have no Occasion or Handle to *blaspheme*, Tit. ii. 3, 4, 5. So likewise the Apostle *John* puts the Christians upon Ways of being *Fellow-helpers to the Truth*, Epist. iii. ver. 8.

Indeed the Christians in those early Ages were so full of Christ, and the Gospel Way of Salvation; they were animated by the *Spirit* of Grace and Power from on high in such a divine and extraordinary Manner, as render'd them wonderfully active and zealous in this blessed Cause. Thus they prayed; they wrestled and strove hard with God for the Furtherance and Success of the Gospel: No Diligence, no Labour or Pains were wanting. Their Lives were so humble and holy, so harmless and beneficial, so self-denying and heavenly, that hereby they would help forward the Gospel very much where-ever they came. And something of the same Spirit among Christians, and the same manner of Practice, would be found in any of the later Ages of the Church, where Religion has been in its flourishing State, if Observation was carefully made upon them; even in any particular Places, Congregations and Churches. Now if this is the Case, according to Fact and Experience, certainly it must recommend the Practice to all that would be glad to see Religion revived in the Life, Spirit, and Power of it.

In proceeding upon that which is here intended I shall conduct my Discourse in the following Manner; I will shew, *Wherein Christians are to be helpful to their Ministers*; — *Useful in the Congregations and Churches they belong to*; — *the peculiar Advantages of their being so*; — *How they are to be brought to this, and put into the Way of it*. Some Objections against a Practice of this Sort, shall be stated and answered; — and the whole concluded, with Heads of Caution, Advice and Direction to Christians, in these Attempts to which I am exhorting them.

C H A P. I.

The various Ways wherein Christians should be helpful to their Ministers.

THE Ways in which Christians may and ought to be helpful to their Ministers are such as these ;

1. By *Family Instruction and Catechising, and making Way for the Ministers Instructions and Labours.*

It must not altogether be passed over here ; that it belongs to Parents and the Masters of Families, to all who have the Charge of others under them, to keep up the daily Worship of God in their Houses ; to have the holy Scriptures read, and to make their Morning and Evening Offering of Prayer and Thanksgiving to God. *Pour out thy Fury upon the Heathen, and upon the Families that call not on thy Name, Jer. x. 25.* So, there must be a careful and a religious Observation of the Lord's Day. *It is the Sabbath of the Lord in all your Dwellings, Lev. xxiii. 3.* But what I chiefly intend here is, that in Families there shou'd be *personal Instruction*. Heads of Families shou'd take all convenient Opportunities to instruct Children and Servants, (especially if they be ignorant) in the Nature and Evil of Sin, in the Things of God, and the World to come, and in the Nature and Importance of their Duty in the several Branches of it. And I doubt not but it wou'd be more useful still, if there were some set and appointed Times for this Purpose, to talk over the principal Heads of Religion. *Catechising* also, I am fully persuaded, shou'd have its Place in Family Instruction and Education. Here *Learners* should not only be taught the Principles of Religion by heart, but their *Instructors* shou'd, as far as possible, lead them to understand Things as they go along. These Things now may well be placed in the present View, as helpful to Ministers ; for every one knows, what a fatal Bar gross Ignorance in the Hearer is to a Minister's being useful to such, and what need such have of being taught the Principles of Religion. So that in some Measure, this is clearing the Ground, and preparing the Way for the Minister. And when young Persons are thus prepared, they shou'd be brought to publick

Catechising, which is a most useful Part of the Service of the Sanctuary, and may be eminently advantageous to the rising Generation. As it will often be found, that Ignorance is hard to be overcome, and the Tempers of young Persons are carefully to be consulted, (a Thing too commonly overlooked) it will be convenient where Difficulties occur this Way, that Parents ask Advice of their Ministers about the most likely Method of making Things easy and taking. And by the Way, it may be well worth a Minister's while, accurately to observe the early Workings of human Nature, and the Tempers of Children he converses with, that he may be more capable of discharging his own Services to them, and directing Parents when they consult him on these Occasions.

2. Christians may be helpful to Ministers, by encouraging an Attendance on the Word and Ordinances of God.

You must encourage the Word and Ordinances of Christ, not only by your own personal Attendance, but by taking care, that your Families also keep close to the House and Ordinances of Christ. *Be swift to hear. Forsake not the assembling of your selves together*, Heb. x. 25. And where you have any Handle or Opportunity for it amongst others, you shou'd be putting them forward this Way too. Come, *Let us go to the House of the Lord*, Psal. cxxii. 1. And in doing this, don't forget to give the Ordinances and Ways of Christ a good Word; speak well and encouragingly of them, as they are amiable and delightful as well as profitable. You may be helpful this Way to Ministers, not only as to the more sacred and publick Seasons of Worship, but on other Occasions, as *Lectures*, and Times of Preparation for the Sacrament. When Persons of leading Characters especially appear forward and constant in these, it is very encouraging to others. But there is hardly any Particular under this Head, in which Christians may be more eminently useful, than in encouraging others to the *Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*, an Ordinance dreadfully neglected in most Places. Many will be more free with you than their Ministers, in discovering their Desire and Inclination after it, or in proposing their Objections and Doubts, their Fears and Difficulties. You can inform your Minister of the Cases of such, or bring them to him, as well as say something inviting and encouraging your selves.

Selves. It is often found, that some eminent Christians of Experience and active Zeal, are very helpful and useful this Way, in encouraging the Word and Ordinances of Christ: But when Christians appear negligent and indifferent about the Means of Religion, this lowers the Esteem of others for them, and so does unspeakable Mischief.

3. Christians may be helpful to their Ministers, by *seconding their Sermons and other Labours.*

Christians should *bear*, not only for their own spiritual Profit and Advantage, but with some View to others too. And therefore Heads and Masters of Families should second the Sermons and Labours of Ministers, not only with an after Review as to themselves on *Lord's Day* Evenings, but as to their Children and Servants. Such as *write* after the Minister may very well make the *Repeating* of what has been heard a Part of Duty when the Family is call'd together. However, I would advise by all means, that the Master of the Family shou'd *talk over* what has been heard, in a free and familiar Way, according as his Memory shall serve; with Intimations before or after, of the Necessity and Importance of *laying up in store* what we hear.

There should likewise be a Time allotted for a particular *Examination* of Children and Servants about what they remember. And in this, weak *Memories*, when they are at a loss, shou'd be led and helped on by Questions that are akin to the Subject, or by short Hints thrown in by the Bye for them to lay hold of. And withal, Care should be taken to enter into, and learn their Sense and Experience of Things about which they are examined. And methinks as to these Things, considering the Weakness of some Memories, and the Shyness and Bashfulness of some Tempers, the Examination shou'd by all means be managed privately and apart, one by one, to give Opportunity for the greater Freedom. In the Close also of the Examination, proper Warning and Advice, Encouragement or Exhortation, should be given them, grounded upon the Subject they have been hearing of. Besides this, the Sermons and Labours of Ministers should be followed with Prayer for the Blessing of God. And where the *Heads*, or Substance of what has been heard is orderly and distinctly brought into the Matter of Prayer, this may prove still farther instructing and edifying. So if upon any special Oc-
casions

cations the Minister has taken Pains with Families or the Members of them, this shou'd have a Remembrance in Prayer. This Business of seconding the Minister's Sermons and Labours may be carried farther too, among Neighbours and Acquaintance, or among Fellow-Christians, when they meet together. A Practice of this Sort, I am persuaded, would be very helpful to Ministers.

4. Christians may also be helpful to their Ministers, *by informing them of the State of Families, and of the State of the Congregation and Church.*

This Instance of Service takes a wide Compass, and is highly needful and important, though I fear but little of it ordinarily comes into Practice. I would not be misunderstood here, a Minister of a generous Temper will abhor the Thought of prying officiously into the Secrets of Families, with a mean, selfish View. But surely none can deny, that he who sustains the Office of a Shepherd, should give Diligence to know the State of his Flock; and for this Purpose he will need the Assistance of private Christians. Where such a Knowledge is wanting a Minister will lie under great Disadvantages. Indeed when particular Cases or Persons are aimed at, Things must by all means be managed with Wisdom and Prudence; but yet some Knowledge this way is apparently necessary. 'Tis true, by Visits, Conversation and Observation, he may in some measure inform himself; yet many Things will escape his Notice if his People be not helpful to him herein. And therefore they shou'd be ready to give him Intelligence of the State of Religion in the Congregation.

Enquiry also shou'd be made into Families, to know how Matters go on here; not only whether Religion be kept up, but as to the Cases of the several Branches. It is very convenient, that a Minister have some Knowledge of the Ignorant, Unbelieving, Carnal and Profane, that he may seek the better after their Conviction and Awakening. But then Care must be taken, that such be not informed against, or dealt with, so as may provoke and incense; for direct Accusations, and personal Complaints, have commonly this Tendency.

Both Ministers and People are to have a particular Eye upon such as are under Convictions and serious Impressions; such as are pricked at the Heart; the sober and

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the well inclined, such as are setting their Faces Heavenward ; where there is *some good Thing towards the Lord God of Israel* ; these must be carefully tended, followed and led on. Now, as private Christians commonly have the best Opportunities of observing these Things, they are capable of acquainting their Minister with such Cases ; may bring such into his Company, and make Way for them, and thus be helpful, as well as by giving Advice and Encouragement themselves. The happy Success of a Practice of this sort is found and felt in some Places. So, where any labour under *Doubts and Fears*, under inward Distress and Perplexity about their Souls ; where Persons or Families are visited with *Afflictions*, under *sore Trials or Calamities* ; where any are haunted and harass'd with *Temptations*, the Cases of these in like manner must be made known to the Minister. Where any appear unsettled in their *Judgments*, fickle and wavering, *toft to and fro with every Wind of Doctrine*, (Eph. iv. 14) and may be in danger of imbibing Errors and swerving from the Truth ; such are to be taken notice of and carefully watched. If any grow cool and indifferent, *lukewarm*, and secure in Profession or Practice, and ready to *backslide* ; the Case of such also calls for suitable Notice. In these several Cases Christians shou'd think themselves concerned, and as prudently as may be let their Minister into the Knowledge of them.

A Minister should be acquainted with the *Walking* of Church-Members ; and therefore his People shou'd take notice, how the several *Members* attend the Lord's Supper in particular, and whether the Tenor of their Lives be agreeable to their Calling and Character in the Church of Christ. Where the Members of Congregations, and more especially the Members of Churches, are found blameable in their Lives ; where any are guilty of gross and scandalous Offences, such are to be taken notice of, and dealt with according to the Rule of our Saviour ; *If a Brother trespass, &c. Matt. xviii. 15—18*. But here let me add, that Caution is needful both in Ministers and People, that a great Difference be always observed between human Infirmities, Weaknesses and Mistakes, and great and scandalous Crimes. If little Disgusts and Resentments, personal Ill-will, or spiteful Complaints be indulged and admitted, this will create no little Mischief in Congregations and Churches. Agreeably to what

I am upon, I know it is the Practice of some Churches, (and a Practice that I can't but approve of and wish well to) where some of the wiser and more experienced Men of leading and honourable Characters in the Church, (suppose the *Deacons*) have this Work more immediately put upon them, (*viz.* to have the Oversight of the Members, — whether they attend the *Sacrament*, &c.) And with the Minister they have a Hand in enquiring into the Reasons and Occasions of Neglects and Omissions, as these discover themselves. Nor are the *Poor* to be forgotten on this Occasion, but proper Intelligence is to be given, that suitable Provision may be made for their Relief: A Care so much the more necessary, as we often find that those who have the justest Claim to these Assistances are the least forward to ask them.

5. Christians may be helpful to their Ministers, by *joining with them in any Measures and Undertakings for the common Good of the Society.*

The general Apostolical Canon is, *Let all Things be done to edifying*, 1 Cor. xiv. 26: And though we disclaim all *Imposition* in our selves or others, yet it is now generally known and generally allowed, that Time, and Place, and other Circumstances, will give Occasion for Alterations in Church Order and Discipline. Particular *Modes*, Rules and Measures of Proceeding, may have occasion to vary; though we must always adhere as closely as possible to the Rule of *Scripture*, and the purer Ages of Christianity. As then, the general *Good* and Edification of Congregations and Churches is principally to be sought after and aim'd at, Customs and Measures, though of some ancient standing, when they become inconvenient, offensive or hurtful, shou'd be dropped and laid aside; and if Matters require it, others agreeable to the Gospel, and likely to promote the Peace and Welfare of Churches, should be taken up. So if Measures and Methods which have good Countenance in the Gospel, and Gospel Times, have been neglected and disused, it will be well to have these revived and restored. But these Changes and Regulations, even in the *Customs* of Churches, are tender Things; and as they ought well to be thought of and weighed, together with Circumstances and Consequences that may happen, before any Alterations be set on foot, so when they are attempted, it ought to be with the
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greatest Caution, Wisdom and Prudence, for where *these* have not an hand in the Management, great Mischief has often come in. And therefore when any Thing of this Nature is to be done, Christians are to be helpful to their Ministers: And commonly when they are hearty for the Things themselves, the Work will be found easy; but when it is otherwise, no wise Man will attempt Regulations by himself. Among some perhaps, the *Terms* of Communion may be too narrow; and amongst others, the *Door* of Admission may be too wide and unguarded; and therefore Regulations here, when prudently brought about, may be of Service. Private Meetings for Prayer, Christian Conference, and the promoting of experimental Religion, is a Practice which has often been found, by the Blessing of God, to put almost a new Face upon Things in some Places and Congregations. Not only in Measures and Undertakings for the common Good of Congregations, but in the special Proceedings of Church Order and Communion, (as in the Admission of Members, &c.) as a Minister in all reason should take his People along with him, so if they heartily concur with him they will be found very helpful.

6. Christians may be helpful to Ministers, by *preventing, or removing Discouragements and Hindrances.*

When the Ordinances of Christ are sadly neglected, either on the more publick Seasons of Worship, or on occasional Opportunities, this is a great Discouragement, and a grievous Damp to a Minister in his Work. When Professors run into undue Liberties, pass the Bounds of what is of *good Report*, and tread the Confines of Sin, this gives great Occasion of Scandal and Offence to many serious, tender, watchful Christians, and creates a Minister no small Trouble. Such Things as these should be guarded against, and prevented or removed by those that wou'd be helpful to Ministers.

So when Prejudices, Ill-will, or Resentments, Heart-burnings, and Jealousies, Quarrels and Contentions, arise among Brethren that worship together, and ought to walk together in Love; whether they be about temporal or religious Matters, these threaten a fatal Influence upon the Peace and Edification of Societies. Christians therefore should be watchful, and ready to heal such Breaches;

and happy is it, when they are taken and buried in their first beginnings! Thus the *Apostle* would have civil Differences made up among Christians, that their Quarrels might not expose them and their Profession to the World: *Dare any of you, having a Matter against another, go to Law? &c.* 1 Cor. vi. 1, 4, 5, 6. *If any Man have a Quarrel against another, he presses them to forbear and forgive, as Christ was ready to forgive them.* Col. iii. 13. *Blessed are the Peace-Makers, for they shall be called the Children of God,* Mat. v. 9.

7. Christians may be helpful to Ministers, by supporting and maintaining their Character.

Not that I imagine, when the Characters of any that have taken upon them the Office of the *Ministry*, are scandalous and obnoxious, that they remain so sacred as not to be touched; no, I shall always think a vicious Minister a Shame and Disgrace to his Character and Calling, and earnestly wish all the Churches of Christ were purged from such. But then it must be remembered, that Ministers when they answer their Character and Calling, with suitable Abilities and Graces, and labour for the Glory of *Christ* and the good of Mens Souls with Diligence and Faithfulness, are to be supported in their Characters, or the Interest of Religion will suffer as their Usefulness suffers. We live in an *Age* in which the *Ministry* is violently struck at; and even those that are an Honour to Religion, and their Profession, are blended and branded with the Vile and Scandalous; a Thing as mischievous as it is unjust. Ministers are but Men; and therefore when they fall into some Mistakes and Imprudencies, and betray human Weakness and Imperfection, this especially in *younger Ministers* should not be wrested and aggravated, but kindly softened and pass'd by: Herein Christians may be helpful. When the Persons and Characters of Ministers are unjustly degraded, their Ministrations and Performances run down; when undue Suspitions and Surmises are sent abroad, and Ill-will and Prejudices vent themselves, this is very hurtful to their Ministry, and shou'd be guarded against. And since this Work is not so proper for Ministers themselves, their People shou'd stand up for them, and vindicate them, as the Matter requires. It is often found, what little Things taken up against Ministers without any real Grounds, have

a baneful Influence upon their Usefulness: And therefore Christians should take all Opportunities to put a Stop to any Thing of this sort. When a Minister answers his Character, as he is *the Servant of the Lord*, so he is a great Friend to Men, in labouring for their best, their spiritual and eternal Interest; and as such he ought to be respected.

8. Christians shou'd be helpful to Ministers *by praying for them.*

Thus the Apostle *Paul* bespeaks the Prayers of the *Thessalonians* for himself and his Fellow-Ministers; *Brethren, pray for us*, 1 Theff. v. 25. And especially upon some Occasions, when Difficulties, Dangers, and Trials beset him, he cries out for the Prayers of Christians, that they wou'd *strive* and *wrestle* with God for him, *Rom.* xv. 30. and *Col.* iv. 3. And when Deliverance is obtained, he tells the *Corinthians*, their Prayers were *helpful* towards it, 2 *Cor.* i. 11.

You should pray, that God by his Spirit would encrease and enlarge their Abilities for their Work, their Gifts and Graces, — That the *Spirit* of heavenly Light and Influence wou'd preside over them, and guide them in their Studies and Preparations for the Sanctuary and the Altar. — That they may come forth to you, *in the Fullness of the Blessing of the Gospel of Peace*; *feed the Flock of God, and give to every one their Portion in due Season.* — That God would give them Strength, Life, and Zeal, for their going through their Work. — That all Obstacles and Hindrances may be taken out of the Way of their Usefulness. Your Prayers shou'd regard their Work before it comes on. Thus on *Lord's-Day* Mornings, when in secret, or Family-Worship, you ask the Blessing of God upon the *Means* you are to attend; send up some earnest Petitions for your Minister. And when the *Seed* has been sown, and you go back to the Throne of Grace in your own Houses, it shou'd be watered again with the Prayers of the several Parts of the Congregation for a farther Blessing. Considering, now, the Promises of God, the special Encouragement he has given to Prayer, and the wonderful Success Prayer meets with in the Court of Heaven; if Christians were hearty, fervent, and constant in a Practice of this sort, it might certainly be expected that their Prayers would help forward

the Minister's Work and Labours. But when Prayer is not going up to God, in behalf of the Minister you sit under, that which wou'd be helpful is wanting. *Many* may be helpful to Ministers by their Prayers, that can do little for them any other way. Let your Ministers then have your constant Remembrance in your Addresses to the Throne of Grace.

These are the various Ways in which Christians may be helpful to their Ministers, and very much so by the Blessing of God. O that there was a better Spirit and Disposition this Way in all the Assemblies of the Faithful!

C H A P. II.

Wherein Christians are to be useful in the Congregations and Churches to which they belong.

HAVING shew'd wherein Christians are to be helpful to Ministers, it may seem at first as though what I here propose was too near akin to be considered separately from the former. But if in some Instances these Things should nearly coincide, yet if in others they will not only admit of being cast into a different View, but of being enlarged and carried farther, this will be of Advantage to my Design. And as to the Christian's *Usefulness* in the Congregation and Church, I apprehend several Things may be mentioned, which will lead him to be farther helpful in his Place and Character, beyond what he was put upon in the former Chapter; as,

1. *By Christians being useful in their Families, they will also be useful to the Congregations and Churches they belong to.*

How much the Interest of Congregations and Churches depends upon their particular Families, is easily apprehended. Now and then indeed, some may be brought in from distant Quarters, from Places and Habitations of Ignorance, and a Kind of heathenish Darknes; but our chief Hopes and Expectations concerning Congregations and Churches, must be from Christian Families: These
are

are like little Nurseries for the Church of Christ, to supply or encrease it. And therefore such as would be useful must set themselves, in the first Place, to do what they can at *home*. When Christians are wanting in their Families in this respect, it can hardly be expected they will exert themselves abroad: But if they shou'd appear forward amongst others, yet as it will be easily known that they take little or no Care of their own Household, this will give a shrewd Suspicion that they are not acted by a laudable Design to promote Religion, but by some selfish, mean, base View; and this will prevent their doing any good. Parents therefore, and the Heads of Families, must labour to do Good, and be useful amongst those under their immediate Care and Charge, by all the Ways and Methods of spiritual Service; by teaching and instructing Children and Servants, warning and exhorting of them, encouraging, and giving what Assistance they can in the Ways of God; — by keeping up Family Religion, and setting good and amiable Examples before those in whose View they daily walk. When any of the younger Branches of Families appear serious and well tintur'd with Sobriety and Religion, they should also be put into the Way of assisting Brothers and Sisters, and others of their Companions in the Congregation. There is something peculiarly engaging in this too; when young Persons, the Children of religious Parents and Families, (whose Birth and Station sets them superior to Servants) will condescend, in a kind and friendly Way, to be Instructors and Monitors to Servants in the Behalf of God and Christ. Here Christians must begin, that would be serviceable to the Interest of Congregations and Churches, they must set themselves to be useful in their own Families.

2. Christians are to be useful in the Congregations and Churches they belong to, *by encouraging an Attendance upon the Word and Ordinances of Christ.*

What has already been said on this Head, as affording Help to Ministers, may very well be applied to the present Purpose, as one Way of being Useful in the Congregation and Church. Where the *Lord's Day* is religiously and conscientiously observed and kept up by Christians, and the Ordinances of God's House honourably attended, this has a manifest Tendency towards the Good of Congregations.

tions. But where Christians are not Encouragers of the Means of Grace, it is hard to conceive how they shou'd be much useful other ways. If they appear wanting here- in they'll not be much minded in other Things.

3. Christians may be useful in the Congregations and Churches they belong to, *by cultivating and maintaining a good Understanding, a free and friendly Acquaintance, Intimacy, and Conversation, amongst one another.*

The Religion of Christians is a great Friend to all the Branches and Offices of Humanity amongst Men. But Persons of the same Society, Fellow-Christians, and Fellow-Members of Christ, who worship together, ought to walk together in a nearer and stricter Friendship and Love. Thus Fellow-Christians are frequently taught to carry it with a peculiar Concern, Kindness, and Affection, towards one another. *Be ye kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly Love, in Honour preferring one another,* Rom. xii. 10. *Let brotherly Love continue,* Heb. xiii. 1. A Strangeness, Distance, and Shyness, amongst such, as if they were not of the same Family and Community, is unnatural and unbecoming. This too commonly breeds something of an ill Spirit, creates Trouble to a Minister, and deprives Christians of the Opportunity of performing many great and useful Offices and Duties which they owe one towards another. Fellow-Christians therefore, should seek after a Knowledge of each other; and this should be carried into a near and friendly Acquaintance, Freedom, and Intimacy, so as to make way for conversing usefully together. For Instance, the leading Persons of Congregations and Churches should always cultivate and maintain a good Understanding among themselves, that their Affairs may be consulted and carried on with Concert and Agreement, in Harmony and Love. The Rich and the Wealthy should take kind and friendly Notice of the Poor; the Aged of the Young, and the more wise and experienced of the Weak and Unskilful; and this they should do with a View to be useful too. Where any appear well inclined, and hopeful, looking *Sion-wards*, every Eye should take Notice of them with Pleasure, and every Tongue be ready to welcome them into the Ways of God and Heaven. Those that would do Good, and be useful in Congregations, should carry it
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thus, especially towards the young ones of the *Flock*, that appear promising and hopeful. They should look upon such with Pleasure, and rejoice over them; should receive them as a sort of Companions, and make their Company easy and agreeable to them; should always speak encouragingly, and give Religion and the Service of Christ a good and honourable Word. From their own Experience, they should with an Air of Satisfaction join the Testimony of Scripture, and let them know, that *Wisdom's Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and her Paths, Paths of Peace*, Prov. iii. 17. That *Christ's Commandments are not grievous*, 1 John v. 3. But in keeping of them, as well as for keeping of them, *there is great Reward*, Psal. xix. 11. Thus Christians of the same Society and Communion, should carefully promote a good Understanding, Intimacy, and Friendship, with one another; shou'd seek and delight much in each other's Company; should carry it as *Companions in the Kingdom and Patience of Christ*. And this good Understanding and Friendship might be rendered profitable and useful by frequent friendly Visits and Conversation: As they shou'd not be Strangers to one another, neither shou'd they be Strangers to each others *Houses*. And it would be better still, when Fellow-Christians meet together and Opportunity serves, if their Discourse and Conversation, now and then, turned professedly upon religious Subjects; either in confirming each other in the Grounds of their common Faith, or in entering upon some Head of inward and experimental Religion, Cases of Conscience, Difficulties, Temptations, &c. This is no inconsiderable Step in the Way of Christians being useful to one another, and so useful in the Congregations and Churches they belong to: For where a good Understanding, Friendship, and Love, is wanting, Opportunities for doing Good very much cease; and besides, something will be found very prejudicial to the Peace and Edification of Societies.

4. Christians may be useful in the Congregations and Churches they belong to, *by a suitable, engaging, winning, and exemplary Carriage and Behaviour.*

The *Gospel*, and the Grace of it, where these prevail, give an inward Excellency to the Christian Mind, a Frame of Heart that should beget Admiration and Esteem in all that understand what a *God-like Temper* means. And in some

some Measure the Christian will be of a Piece, his outward Actions and Deportment like the inward Temper of the gracious Mind. The Gospel, and the Grace of it, is so far from befriending any ill Qualities and Dispositions in the Professors of it, that it strikes at, and labours to wear off whatever savours of the proud, sullen, and morose Kind; the ill-natur'd, injurious or cruel. This teaches us to be civil, affable, and courteous, harmless and inoffensive, good-natured, kind, and beneficial towards all Men. And when a becoming Civility, Kindness, and Benevolence towards Men, naturally mingles it self with the Christian Carriage; this must in some Measure be engaging to all Beholders. When Christians carry about them, even in the Eyes of the World, *the Things that are lovely, and of good Report*, as the *Apostle* directs, *Phil. iv. 8.* Where the Fruits of the Spirit breathe sweetly from them in their Lives; such as *Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Temperance*, (*Gal. v. 22, 23.*) *as there is no Law against such Things*, so others will find nothing to say against them, but may be greatly softened and won upon hereby. And every Thing in the Christian Carriage that is engaging and attracting, as Humility, Meekness, and a condescending Temper, Self-Denial, Forbearance, and Forgiveness, hearty Good-will, Friendship, and Charity, Moderation, Prudence, Cheerfulness, &c. should be sought and endeavoured after by Fellow-Christians and Fellow-Members one towards another, *Rom. xii. 16—19.* *Be of the same Mind one towards another; Mind not high Things, but condescend to Men of low Estate. Re-compence to no Man Evil for Evil. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all Men.* *Col. iii. 12—15.* *Put on therefore, as the Elect of God, Bowels of Mercy, Kindness, &c.* *2 Pet. i. 7.* *Add to Godliness brotherly Kindness, and to brotherly Kindness Charity.* Such should the Carriage of Christians be, when they aim to do Good among young Persons. All their Warnings and Reproofs, Persuasions and Encouragements, should ordinarily come from them in an engaging and obliging way. In the same Way too, shou'd all *brotherly* Offices and Duties be performed by Christians one towards another. But when Persons greatly miss it as to this in their Carriage towards each other, they commonly lose their Aim when they seek to do some good. Proud,
impe-

imperious, haughty, morose Airs, rather disgust and affright Persons than gain upon them. I can't but heartily wish here, that Dr. Watts's fine Sermon of a lovely Carriage (Vol. II. of his Sermons) was carefully read and taken along with Christians into their daily Walk and Conversation.

Christians shou'd be useful also in the Congregation and Church, by an *exemplary Carriage*. Mat. v. 16. *Let your Lights so shine before Men, that they may see your good Works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.* Phil. ii. 14, 15, 16. *Do all Things without Murmurings and Disputings; that ye may be blameless and harmless, the Sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse Nation, among whom ye shine as Lights in the World; holding forth the Word of Life.* Examples, we find, whether they be good or bad, will do something with those that lie within the Reach of them. Ill Examples do an unspeakable deal of Mischief, as Sin and Wickedness is both taught and countenanced hereby. And when the Lives of Professors are blemished with any considerable Failings and Miscarriages, this not only cuts them off from being useful to others, but commonly occasioneth farther Mischief. It is in vain for those to pretend to mend others that very much want reforming themselves. But when Christians, by a good and honourable Conversation, set good Examples before the Eyes of others, it is to be hoped that some will learn hereby, and that others will be quickened, encouraged, and confirmed in their Way. Those that would be useful Christians certainly should be exemplary ones; *exemplary* in their Families, exemplary in the House and Ordinances of God, and exemplary in their Callings and Conduct amongst Men. When Christians appear excellent Patterns of all Goodness, this will be a Means of doing Good, and will give Countenance and Force to all their Ways and Endeavours of being useful.

5. Christians may be useful in Congregations and Churches to which they belong, *by being ready to counsel and advise, exhort, encourage, comfort and assist each other.*

There are many Offices of this Nature friendly to Religion, which Christians have frequent Opportunities of discharging one to another; and these are recommended and

inforced as Matter of Duty by the Scriptures of Truth. *Rom. xiv. 19. Seek the Things that make for Peace, and wherewith ye may edify one another. Heb. iii. 13. Exhort one another daily, while it is called to Day. So, Chap. x. 24. Consider one another, to provoke to Love, and good Works.* In the more immediate Business and Concerns of Religion and Godliness Christians may be useful, not only by seasonable Counsel, Warning and Advice to the *Ignorant and Carnal*, as common Opportunity serves, but there are some special Circumstances and Occasions in which they ought to attempt it with peculiar Care, and a more affectionate Zeal. It often happens, that some Persons want Counsel and Advice, either about Matters of *Faith*, or Matters of Duty, or Difficulties that occur in the Religious Life; and therefore the Wise and Experienced might become helpful and serviceable here. When any appear Negligent and Indifferent, in a declining Way as to Christian Profession and Practice, and ready to backslide, those that would be found in the Way of Usefulness should take Opportunity to endeavour to convince and recover such. Herein, as well as in other Cases, it is the Duty of Fellow-Christians faithfully to *admonish one another*, *Rom. xv. 14.*

So when Fellow-Christians, or Fellow-Members, are under inward, spiritual Darknes, Trouble and Distress; set upon with Oppositions and Temptations, and almost fainting under them, this is a special Season when *Brethren* should step in to encourage and comfort, advise, direct, and pray for them. *When thou art converted strengthen thy Brethren*, *Luke xxii. 31, 32. Christians are to bear one another's Burdens; to weep with them that weep*, *Rom. xii. 15.* When Persons or Families are visited with bodily Afflictions and Diseases, or oppressed with outward Straits, Difficulties, and Calamities, this also is an inviting Season for Christian Friends and Brethren to interpose, and exert this *Labour of Love* I am now recommending. We are to remember those that are *in Bonds as bound with them; and them that suffer Adversity, as being ourselves also in the Body*, *Heb. xiii. 3.* And as to the *Poor* of the Flock, when any of these Things happen among them, they should not be overlooked or forgotten, but should be made Sharers of the Notice and Assistance of Fellow-Christians as well as others. So in temporal and civil Affairs, in the Business of Mens
Call.

Callings, and the Concerns of common Life, *tender Consciences* especially, and such as would act safely in all Things, so as to keep Conscience void of Offence, will often stand in need of Counsel and Direction. And *in the Multitude of Counsellors there is Safety*, Prov. xi. 14. When Advice can be had from Men of known Religion and Conscience, it is certainly most desirable, and may most safely be depended upon. And as to this, some Christians of Ability, Wisdom and Prudence, have been very useful, and hereby have obtained an honourable Name and Character among Men, as well as the pleasing Consciousness of having discharged their Duty. The Advantage and Service arising from a becoming Care in all the forementioned Particulars, is so apparent and manifold, that the very mentioning of them may be a sufficient Recommendation.

6. Christians may be useful in the Congregation and Church, *by preventing of Errors, healing of Breaches, Animositities, &c.*

I would not encourage any to lay a disproportionate Stress on those Things in *Divinity* which are only Matters of curious Speculation, nor advise them to be over solicitous about bringing others exactly to their own Sentiments in them. But, such *Errors* as endanger in any a Departure from the Faith once delivered to the Saints; ——— Such as have a fatal Tendency to divert Persons Regards from the Lord *Jesus Christ*, and the blessed Spirit of Grace and Truth, ——— or to weaken a Sense of their Obligations to vital, practical Religion ——— such as lead towards a *Party Spirit*, or Party Measures; when these get footing, and are in danger of spreading themselves, 'tis the Duty of useful Christians to endeavour to put a Stop to them. They may endeavour in a Christian Spirit to convince the Erroneous, and set them right in their Judgments; ——— or labour to shew them, that what they contend for is not of so great Importance as they apprehend; ——— that Contentions are of mischievous Consequence among Brethren. Or if Occasion be, they may bring the Matter of *Debate* before the Minister. Error is a perplexed Labyrinth, where weak Heads easily lose themselves, but don't so easily find the Way out again; and therefore sometimes when the Erroneous will not be convinced, but remain obstinate and troublesome

it may be best to perplex, puzzle, and confound them, in order to silence, if not shame them. Such as are in danger of being *drawn away*, should, methinks, be kept out of the Way of Infection, or prepared and armed against it. But here, let it be carefully remember'd, that the Dealing with these Things must not be with Heat, Violence, or Bitterness; these ordinarily tend only to rivet Persons the faster where they are, or drive them the farther off from the Truth. Things here must by all means be managed with Temper and Prudence; and therefore the *wise* and experienced, and Persons of Steadiness and Conduct, will do most and best in this Work. So where Strangeness, Ill-will, and Heart-burnings, either among Families or Fellow-Christians, are kindling, and begin to shew themselves, it is Time for the *Sons of Peace* to set to work; for these threaten the Peace and Edification, if not the very Frame and Subsistence of Societies. Whether they arise upon a Personal or Family Account, upon a Civil or Religious Bottom, they have an ill Face and a mischievous Tendency: Especially when they look towards Party-Measures; when they run out into Disputings, and blow up the Coals of Strife and Contention, then especially the *Friends of Peace and Love*, and Godliness, should step in to assuage and stop the growing Mischief. *Eph. iv. 31, 32. Let all Bitterness and Wrath, and Anger, and Clamour, and Evil-speaking, be put away from you, &c.* In such Cases as these useful Christians must act the Part of *Peace-Makers*. This indeed is an unpleasant as well as a difficult Work; nothing requires greater Temper and Prudence. Happy is it, where nothing of this Nature happens in Congregations and Churches! Nay, considering human Nature, happy is it, I may say, where every Congregation has *some* that are hearty and active Friends of Love and Peace.

7. Christians may be useful in the Congregations and Churches they belong to, *by encouraging and upholding private Meetings and Assemblies.*

It must be owned, that amongst our pious *Fore-fathers*, this was a Practice of no small Esteem and Note*. And one great Reason why it has been laid aside in many Con-

* See *Neal's Hist. of the Pur.* Vol. I. p. 275, &c. and *Calamy's Abridgment*, Vol. I. p. 29.

gregations, seems to be, that such private *Meetings* in some Places have been upon an ill Footing, under imprudent Management, and attended with some disagreeable Consequences. But after an impartial Review of this Matter, I can't but propose it among the other Ways of Christians being useful in the Congregations and Churches they belong to; for it seems pretty plain to me, that if such private Assemblies were set up under a proper *Decorum* and due Regulations, and so carried on, they might be made very advantageous to Societies. It would seem, as if those were some such private Associations and Meetings on Foot among the Godly in ancient Days, which we find recorded with so much Honour by the Prophet *Malachi*, Chap. iii. 16, 17. And well known as the Passage is, yet it is so weighty and pathetick, that I can't forbear producing it at large. *Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a Book of Remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his Name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that Day when I make up my Jewels; and I will spare them, as a Man spareth his own Son that serveth him.* Such private Associations and Meetings might be of Use, methinks, for Christian Conference and Conversation. I shall take leave to insert here, what I read with great Pleasure in Dr. *S. Wright's* excellent *Treatise of the Deceitfulness of Sin* *. Amongst other Means to prevent Sin's deceiving and hardening, he proposes this, as favoured by known Experience, and what has often been found useful; that, "Christians should
" form themselves into voluntary Societies or Associations,
" on purpose to watch over each others moral Conduct,
" and to promote experimental Religion. — I know,
" says he, there is a Society for propagating of Christian
" Knowledge, Societies for Reformation of Manners; but
" these are none of them so constituted as to prevent the
" Progress and Power of Sin in the Manner of the Text.
" A Society acting upon such a Foot, must be a select
" Number of Men, freely communicating a Sense of their
" Frailties and Dangers to one another, and consulting
" about proper Ways for Preservative or Recovery, &c."

* Page 180, 181, 190.

For Christians to meet together at set Times now and then (suppose once a Week) and part of their Time to be allotted for free and familiar Discourse and Converse upon some particular Head or Branch of Religion, might be very useful. This, methinks, would be a likely Means of promoting a good Understanding among Fellow-Christians, — to promote a Freedom of Thought, and an Aptness and Readiness in Religious Conversation; — to enlarge Christian Knowledge and Experience; — to excite and encourage one another in the Ways of God and Heaven. This might prove helpful against Difficulties, Discouragements and Temptations: — And by this Means too, Family-Religion might the more easily be introduced and set up in Families. If private Meetings were kept up among the Members of Congregations and Churches with this View, and under proper Regulations and Management, I can't but hope some such Advantages as these would attend them. The Time allotted for such private *Meetings*, should not, I think, be intirely confined to Christian Conference; but there are other Things which should bear their part. The Way of *Repeating* Sermons, as is customary among some, may be of Use when done with Judgment and Seriousness. But a Confinement to this, I apprehend, would not be so well, as it might shut out Religious Discourse and Conversation, to which I would by all means allow a Place in these Exercises. Sometimes the Affairs of the Congregation will require to be looked over, considered and consulted about, and therefore should have a Place here; and by this means Persons will insensibly, as it were, be interested in, and attached to the common Interest. Another Thing also, which demands no small Part in these Meetings, is *Prayer*. The Persons concerned herein should take their Part in Prayer to God, for their Minister and the Success of Ordinances; and for the State of the Congregation and Church to which they belong. And as particular Circumstances call for suitable Notice; such as remarkable Occurrences of Providence, the good Work going on or at a Stand, great Declensions among any, Persons or Families under Afflictions, &c. according as these fall out, the Work of Prayer should have a larger Share in these Exercises. It does not seem so proper indeed, that the Work of these private Meetings shou'd be under an exact Confinement, or be carried on in a constant *Round*; but as Variety makes Things the more pleasing,

pleasing, so there may be an Alteration and Variation as Occasions or Prudence shall direct. Farther, as to these private Associations and Assemblies among Fellow-Christians, some greater Advantages might attend them still, perhaps, if they were distinct and separate ones; young Persons by themselves, and others by themselves. I can't but think these Things deserve fresh Notice and Consideration, when many amongst us are thoughtful about Ways and Means of promoting and reviving practical Godliness. And if Experience may be admitted on the Side of these Things, then many Places and Congregations where they are on foot under prudent Management, will witness to their great Use and Advantage.

To conclude this Head,

8. I must add to the Particulars already mentioned; Christians, if they desire to be useful, *must be zealous and active, and exert themselves much, for the Glory of God, and the Good of the Society to which they stand related.*

That ignorant and misguided Zeal, which the *Apostle* calls a Zeal not according to Knowledge, Rom. x. 2. That Zeal which spends it self on little, empty, lifeless Speculations, or extrernal, indifferent *Forms*, and is often as furious as it is blind, this is so far from being encouraged, that it should rather be solicitously guarded against in ourselves, and if possible, extinguish'd in others. But a true, prudent, and well directed Zeal for God and Divine Things, must be confess'd to stand among the superior Attainments of the Christian Character. Gal. iv. 18. *It is good to be zealously affected always in a good Thing.* Christian Zeal, as it is very much founded in the Christian Principles of Faith and Love, so it is a warm, a lively Concern of Heart, to have God glorified in the Creature; to see the Savour of Christ's Name spread it self far and near, his Kingdom advanced, and Men brought into it. Where this obtains, it will shew and exert it self against Sin and Wickedness. The Man of true Zeal for God will be zealous for the Religious Observation of the *Lord's Day*; ——— zealous for the House and Ordinances of Christ, and the Success of the Ministry; ——— zealous for all Christ's Ways, for all the substantial Parts of Faith and Godliness. Where Christians are impress'd and animated with such a Spirit as this, they will be zealous and
I active

active to encourage and promote Religion, especially in the Congregations and Churches they belong to: They will use Diligence, take Pains, and exert themselves to do something, by the Blessing of God, that the Interest of Christ, and the everlasting Welfare of Souls, may be going forward amongst them. Men of Zeal and Activity for God will readily and heartily join Issue with the Minister, as being concerned in the same Cause; will go along with him, and strengthen his Hands in all Measures that may be helpful to the common Interest.

If Christians now were but thus forward, active, and zealous in the Cause of God and *Souls*, what blessed Work would it make amongst us? Was it thus with Persons of some Standing and Character in Congregations and Churches, they would ordinarily be much more helpful and useful than they are; and by their forward and laudable Examples, they might quicken others to take the same Steps. The *Apostle* tells the *Corinthians*, that their *Forwardness* and Zeal to minister Relief to the poor *Saints*, had provoked very many, 2 Cor. ix. 2. It is often found in some small Congregations, that a few such eminent Christians, of an active, zealous Spirit, have been the Means, under the Care and Blessing of Christ, of supporting an *Interest* to a Wonder: And on the other hand, when such have been removed by Death, the Loss of them has been sensibly felt, and Things afterwards could hardly maintain their ground; this shews the Importance they were of. For my part, I shall never wonder, when a Sort of *Lethargy* and Deadness has seized the Members of Congregations and Churches, if the great *Work* goes on heavily and slowly; for this is enough to grieve and provoke the good *Spirit* of Grace, and set him and his Blessing at a distance. I am confident it highly concerns Ministers, to take Opportunities and great Pains to instil these Things into their People; to awake and rouse them up into a lively Concern for the common Interest, to form them into a publick Spirit; to encourage and prompt their Zeal and Activity, and put them forward in Ways of Usefulness; and especially to let their People see these Things to the Life, in their own Examples, and in the Steps they take to do good and be useful.

C H A P. III.

What the peculiar Advantages are that would attend such a Practice as this amongst Christians.

SUCH a Practice as this, of Christians being helpful to Ministers, and useful in the Congregation and Church, carries along with it some peculiar Advantages to recommend and enforce it.

1. *Ministers, as to their Work, would reap great Advantage from it.*

They would be greatly encouraged and animated hereby. — If a Minister be left to stand alone, as it were, this must needs be an unspeakable Discouragement to him: He'll often be forced to complain and lament in secret, for want of that Help and Assistance which Circumstances call for. But on the contrary, if he finds his People doing their Part in their Families, encouraging Ordinances all they can, helpful and useful amongst one another, entering heartily along with him into all Measures and Undertakings serviceable to the common Interest, and forward and ready to every good Work; this will be an unspeakable Encouragement to him. This will lay a wide Foundation before him, for his Hopes and Expectations to build upon; this will be a daily Source of inward Satisfaction and Delight. This will add Pleasure to his Studies, and Fervency to his Prayers; it will quicken his Diligence and his Zeal, and give Life and Spirit to all his Labours: It would be a mighty Encouragement and Help every way. What will not faithful Ministers be willing to do, when there is such a Spirit and Readiness among their People? It would also make the Work easier to a Minister, where he has many other Hands to assist and strengthen his own. It was a kind Part in Jonathan to his Friend David, that he strengthened his Hands in his God, 1 Sam. xxiii. 16. Now according to this Scheme Christians will sometimes be going before the Minister, in preparing the Ground and cutting out Work for him, or in removing Hinderances and Difficulties out of the Way. Sometimes they will be going along with him,

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and acting their Part as *Fellow-Helpers* to the Work. And at other Times they are coming after him, and in their Way of doing Good going over the same Ground where the Minister had been before them, in putting their Hand to what he had been doing in order to forward and strengthen the same. Many Hands come in here to assist and help on the Work of Religion in their several Ways.

2. Such a Practice among Christians, *wou'd be of Advantage to Congregations and Churches.*

Hereby many *Hinderances and Impediments* in the Way of Religion *would be prevented or removed*, and such too as will hardly be prevented in any other way. This was the noble Spirit of the *Apostles* and first Ministers of *Christ*, and I may add, of the first Christians too. They were exceedingly concerned and watchful not to lay any *stumbling Blocks* in the Way of the Gospel, and the Success of it; So it should be the Care and Concern of Christians in every Age; and if Hinderances are occasioned by others, these should be removed as much as may be. Now by Care and Pains taken with Families, that gross Ignorance will be removed, which otherwise there would be as to the great Things of Religion and Godliness. It is often a great Hinderance that *we* can't come at some, and are unacquainted with the Cases of others that call for Assistance; but here you might help us out. Occasions of *Scandal*, and giving Offence, too commonly happen; — Prejudices, Resentments and Heart-Burnings arise among Brethren; in these Cases you may be helpful and do Service. Difficulties sometimes will be in the Way of bringing Things about for the common Interest, where your Hands only perhaps can make all easy. When Christians are eminently helpful to their Ministers, and useful in the Congregation, many of the most hurtful Hinderances and Impediments to the Support and Growth of Religion, will be either prevented or removed; some will have no Place, by reason of such Helpfulness, and others will be removed by degrees. But if our People are not assisting to us, many such there will be; some unavoidable upon this very account, and many more accidentally creeping in. Another Thing is, this would be *an Honour and an Encouragement to Religion*, and a Means to quicken and stir up others.

Religion in it self is a most excellent Thing! There is a Glory in it taken from the blessed Author of it; and its Design is to transfer the same to its *Votaries*. But the Professors of it in common, come so far short of its noble Spirit and Attainments, and mingle so much of another Kind with it, that instead of setting it off in its own amiable Colours, they rather darken and disgrace it. Hence it is, that it greatly loses its Name and Influence in many Places. But were Christians now as they shou'd be, not only hearty and fervent in carrying on the Concernments of their own Souls with the World above, but did they manifest a true Christian Spirit and Behaviour in their general Course; did they appear like eminent and useful Persons amongst Men, useful in their Families in the best Sense, doing good to one another, and useful in the Congregation and Church: Were Christians, I say, hearty, active, and zealous in these Things, Religion it self would have Honour in them, as it is just it should, seeing it is this that makes them such eminent, useful Persons. Thus Religion would carry a better Name and Countenance. Sin and Wickedness wou'd be ready to hide their Heads and vanish before it. Envy and Malice would find little Room to load the Christian Profession with Reproaches. The very Enemies of Religion would be forced surely, to confess the superior Excellencies and Virtues of it, or to stand still in Silence and Shame. And whatever particular Profession they make, or Society they belong to, that Profession and that Society would come in for its Share of Honour, resulting from the Behaviour I have now recommended. I must further add, that this will be a likely means to *quicken and stir up others*. When the Heads of Families, the Members, and leading Persons of Congregations, appear to stand up boldly and bravely for the Cause of Religion; when they appear ready to assist others, active and useful; this will greatly blunt the Edge, and take off the Force of Discouragements, from the Frowns, Threatnings, or hard Names of the World, which have so fatal an Influence upon many that begin to look *Sion-wards*. This surely would shame the Indolence and Coldness of many, and be ready to kindle at least some Sparks of Zeal for God and his Cause. One would hope this might put Life, Spirit and Zeal into others, that behold what such are industriously doing for God, and the good Cause. Methinks I can al-

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most hope, that by this Means the Practice would grow and spread it self in some Measure amongst the greater part of a Congregation. However, if the Heads of Congregations and Churches were leading the Way in the Path of Usefulness, some would be learning, and by degrees taking the same Steps: This may be expected from those of the *Rising Generation*, that are, or shall prove hopeful and serious. And thus, as one Set of useful Persons were going off the Stage, another would be coming on to fill up their Places. Nay, the Use and Service of such a Practice seems to *extend it self to the Work of Religion and Godliness, in every View and Step of its Progress in Societies.* Indeed the Efficacy and Success of the Gospel, and of all Ways and Measures to be used to promote Religion, depends upon the Blessing of God in the Hands of the *Spirit*. But Persons may many Ways provoke God, and grieve the good Spirit. And it can hardly be doubted, but the Lukewarmness, Negligence, and Sloth of Christians, and their great Neglect of proper Means and Measures, is one great Occasion that little Good is done or going forward in some Places and Congregations. But when Christians are found helpful and useful, in the several Ways in which they ought to be so; when Minister and People join heartily in all Measures to promote and advance Religion, can it be thought that a *God bearing Prayer*, God who is faithful, and has promised, will not set in with the Work? Can it be thought, that *Christ Jesus*, whose Cause and Interest it is, will not own and smile upon the Undertaking? Will not the good *Spirit* of Grace, whose Office it is to breathe Life and Success into our poor Endeavours, put to his Hand? Yes, the known Success argues the Blessing. Indeed when the Things themselves are well weighed, and considered here, this would be helping Religion in every View, and in every Step of its Progress in Congregations and Churches; for they are to be helpful and useful this way in their Families, in encouraging the Word and Ordinances of *Christ*, in seconding the Labours and Endeavours of Ministers; helpful and useful to one another, and in various Ways useful in the Congregation and Church. Those are happy Places and Congregations indeed, where Minister and People fill their Places, and do their Parts as they should do; where they heartily join Forces in carrying on the great Design of Religion! I grieve

at my very Heart; for those of my *Brethren*, who have their Lot cast amongst such as will be brought to little or nothing this way! I would to God, that in all the Churches of Christ there were a competent Number of eminent, active Christians, ready to enter heartily into all Measures to encourage and promote the real Interest of Religion and Godliness.

3. *Particular Persons*, that are thus *helpful* and *useful*, will also find their Account and *Advantage* in it, as it will very much tend to their own *Edification* and *Comfort*.

If the *Particulars* under which this Practice has been branched out are kept in view, it is easy to observe, that there is hardly an Instance wherein Christians are to be assisting to others, but it tends either directly or indirectly, to mutual Edification among Christians. And therefore whilst any are aiming to do Good to others, they will at the same Time be improving themselves. A few Hints are sufficient to point out the useful Christians own Advantage here. If in your *Families* you are often engaged in leading those under your Care into the Knowledge of Divine Things; or as Occasion and Opportunity invites, are doing something like this amongst others, will not this be teaching your selves afresh, and rendering the great Things of Religion familiar to your selves? *Masters* and *Teachers* to others are at the same Time teaching themselves. When you are endeavouring it with others, will you not at once warn, exhort, excite, and quicken your selves as well as them? Can you give Encouragement, or *hand* Comfort to others, and not taste the Sweetness of it your selves? You'll be adding to your own *Experience* too, by seeing and observing that of others. As there is in this Practice a manifest Tendency to give Persons a fuller View and Insight into the true Interest of Religion and Congregations, and the Ways and Measures of promoting and advancing it, it serves to enlarge the Mind with Love to Religion, and the Souls of Men; — to keep up and encrease Zeal and Publick-Spiritredness; — to teach Prudence and holy Skill in Conduct and Management; even to beget a greater Aptness and Readiness to every good Work.—And then for the Comfort of it; — There is not only some peculiar Pleasure annexed to Actions of this kind, which a religious Mind will

will find and feel, but here is a Foundation for Satisfaction in a larger View. Suppose *you* are found practising commendably in this way, — doing your Part in your Families; — helpful to your Minister, encouraging him, and strengthening his Hands in the great and blessed *Work*; — furnishing your Share of Service, towards the Encouragement and Support of Religion in the Place and Society where your Lot is cast; and assisting Fellow-Christians and Brethren in their various, spiritual Concerns, what a pleasing Consciousness of having done your Duty to God and Man, must take its Place in the Mind upon this account? The very Supposition of all this, only in *Theory*, and at a Distance, carries Pleasure in it; how much more when Conscience makes the Application to it self? Hence too, you wou'd have reason to expect, that you should see others coming in, and taking the same Course for the Good of Religion: And thus you wou'd have Joy at *Heart*, in beholding the Interest and Cause you have loved likely to survive your Time of Action, and be transmitted to future Generations. O delightful Prospect, to every true Lover of God and Religion! But, if Christians do little or nothing in the Way of being helpful and useful, Conscience may well upbraid and aggravate the sinful, shameful Neglect; and set forth a dark and discouraging Prospect, about, *What shall become of Religion?* If the Practice now promises so much *Advantage* to Ministers in their Work, to the Interest of Religion in Societies, and even to the Christian's own Edification and Comfort, I leave *this* to enforce and recommend it.

C H A P. IV.

How Christians are to be brought to be helpful and useful, and put into the Way of it.

THE Want of Christian Helpfulness and Usefulness is a Thing generally seen and felt, and can't but be lamented! And the Occasions of this are such as will not easily be got over. How then shall Christians be brought to it, and put into the Way of it?

I. It

1. It is convenient, *that they be instructed and prepared for it.*

The Subject before us takes a wide Compass; and since Christians are too little sensible, how much they are obliged to these Things in Point of Duty, and of their great Use and Advantage, they shou'd be taught and instructed in the several Ways of being helpful and useful. They shou'd also be prepared and guarded against Difficulties, false Steps, and Imprudencies, as much as may be, in undertaking or carrying them on. Not only what they are to do must be pointed out to them, but the Circumstances of Things, the Tempers and Inclinations, and Humours of such with whom they will have to do, must be consulted: Without something this way little will be done to purpose; and therefore some Care and Pains should be taken, that they be instructed and prepared for these Things. It often falls in a Minister's Way from the *Pulpit*, to call up the Concern of his People for the Glory of God and the Redeemer's Kingdom; to fill them with a melting Concern for Souls; to stand up manfully for the Cause they have put their Hands to; to work them into a publick Spirit, and now and then let fall some *Sparks* as it were, upon their Zeal, to keep that alive and in Motion. But it seems as tho' this wou'd not be sufficient to give them full and particular Instruction and Insight into the Business of Helpfulness and Usefulness: A more private Way of instructing and preparing them for it may best answer the End. This may be done in *Conversation*, as Opportunities serve, and Things fall in the Way. And where Things of this Nature have heretofore had little place, it might be convenient enough to make a designed and set Thing of it at particular Times and Seasons. So when the Affairs of Religion and the Congregation are to be taken into Consideration, some Things may be suggested and dropped looking this way. In Places and Congregations where these Things have had little or no footing, the introducing of them, and setting them up, will be a Thing of Time, and only brought about by degrees. But in Places where these Things have been in use amongst Christians, Observation, Experience and Practice, will go a great Way towards giving an Insight into them. Farther, as for the *younger* Branches of Congregations and Churches, that appear well grounded in Reli.

Religion, and promising for Service and Usefulness, it is highly convenient to enter them into the Way of it: And there seems not a more effectual Way of doing this, than by linking them gradually to the Wise and Experienced, in the Affairs of the Church, or in any useful Measures and Undertakings.

2. They must be put upon it, and encouraged in it.

There is not only too much Backwardness in the Spirits of Persons to these Things, but in some Parts of Christian Helpfulness and Usefulness especially, there are Difficulties and Discouragements that beset the Way. So that Christians must be earnestly exhorted and quickened to exert themselves, by urging upon them the Necessity of their doing so, and the Use they may be of to Ministers, and to the Encouragement of Religion; and by a Variety of other powerful and engaging Motives. And when they are brought into a good Liking of such a Scheme of Management between Minister and People, and are in readiness for it, they should be led into the Practice by easy Steps, first to one Thing, and then to another. And when they perform and promise well, kind Notice should be taken of it, and suitable Commendations bestow'd upon it: This will be a successful Motive with many. And then further, when the good Effects and Consequences of what they have been doing more plainly shew themselves, these should be taken Notice of, and brought upon the Board, to make an Advantage of them in favour of what we are driving at.

3. Would Ministers have their People helpful and useful, let them find Work for them, according to their Age and Abilities, Place and Standing.

Some Work necessary to be done in Congregations and Churches will not be fit for every hand; but it calls for peculiar Abilities, Age, and Experience; and therefore should chiefly be allotted to the more Understanding and Experienced. Such Work amongst some is assigned to a select Number, pitched upon for their Wisdom and Eminency in Religion; and certainly very reasonably. But Christian Usefulness should be carried into as general a Practice as may be. Not only the most eminent Christians of a Society, but others also, should be helpful and useful,

useful, and therefore some Work should be cut out for them by the Minister. Thus they may be put upon Work in their Families; upon encouraging Ordinances, and seconding the Labours of the Minister. They may be directed to Usefulness, in promoting Intimacy, Friendship, Peace and Love among Fellow-Christians; in conversing together, encouraging, exhorting, and helping one another, and in praying with and for one another; and may be taken to bear a Part in the Affairs of the Congregation. Even young Persons, that appear well-grounded in Religion, may be put upon doing something amongst those of their own Age and Rank, to invite them into the Ways of God, to encourage them, to converse frequently together, and in reading good *Books*, and praying together. It is no very difficult Matter for Ministers to find some Work for Persons to do, with a Design to lead them into the Way of Usefulness; and when once they are brought into it, if Religion lies at the *Heart*, the greatest Difficulty is over, and they are easily led on.

4. For such as are found helpful and useful, *care should be taken to support their Character and Interest.*

Though the Services I have been urging are indeed very honourable, and recommend Persons greatly to the Esteem and Love of the wisest and best Part of Mankind; yet Circumstances may occur in which it is odds but they shall meet with hard Names, Censures and Reproaches, with Opposition and Discouragement from one Quarter or another. And these may tempt them to cool their Zeal, and slacken their Diligence, if Ministers and others don't stand by them, and stand up for them too. This is needful as to Persons of leading Characters in the Congregation; their Interest should be supported, to give them Room and Opportunity for Usefulness. And when others are taking the same Measures and Steps, Ministers and Fellow-Christians should favour the good Design and Undertaking; and be ready to skreen or defend them as Occasion requires. Such as are found helpful and useful must not be suffered to be run down, but should rather wear some honourable Mark of Distinction, such as is always due to the most useful Persons.

In some such Method as this, now, methinks it is, that Christians must be brought to be helpful and useful. I

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am aware, that to bring this Practice to any considerable Pitch, will be something difficult in some Places, under some Circumstances. Where it has been little in Esteem or Use it will be difficult to introduce and set it on foot; and a Minister must be contented to look upon it as a Thing to be accomplish'd not at once, but in Time, and by easy Steps: But even in this Case, I apprehend, the attempting of it may be worth while.

C H A P. V.

Some Objections stated and answered.

I Would hope, the peculiar Advantages that might attend such a Practice as this among Christians, appear like so many Witnesses for it. And yet I am very sensible, there are many Objections abroad in the World against a Practice of this Sort, which may very possibly be thought of, and taken up against what I am offering for it.

1. Some are pleaded in favour of the *Ministry*.

If Christians must go along with the *Minister*, when Things are to be transacted which concern the Congregation and Church, "Will not this infringe upon the peculiar Work and Office of Ministers and *Pastors*?" — Why, I hope not. The Main of the Minister's peculiar Work, as I take it, consists in publick Praying, Preaching, and Expounding the Word of God, and in Administring the *Sacraments*; and I can't see how this is broke in upon, by what I have assigned to Christians as the Parts of their Duty, in order to be helpful and useful: And when they keep the Place assigned them there is no danger this way. But it will be said farther, "When these Things are put into the Hands of the People they often render them forward beyond measure; they become proud and troublesome; and can't rest, some of them, 'till they are got into the *Pulpit* themselves." — But now, all this can be urged fairly upon no other foot than that of accidental Consequence; for I am confident, what I here recommend gives

gives no just Grounds for it; so that it must come to this, that a Practice of this Sort among Christians may be, and sometimes is abused: Some take Occasion from it to run into Extremes. Doubtless, other Things are to be taken in here, as giving Rise, in part at least, to such Inconveniencies. Where they happen, it is often observed to be from Things being upon an ill Footing, and under imprudent Management; from giving, it may be, improper Persons too much *Share* in some Things. But this, I propose, should be guarded against, and Care and Pains taken to instruct and prepare Persons for Helpfulness and Usefulness. It deserves to be considered here also, Whether these Inconveniencies don't sometimes arise from the Want of giving Encouragement to some, in Ways and Measures of Christian Diligence and Helpfulness; from the Want of putting some Persons upon proper Work: And so because they are discouraged from doing any Thing, others take upon themselves more than belongs to them. An intire Discouragement as to Christian Helpfulness seems sometimes to tempt some to exceed all due Bounds, and to break loose from their proper Sphere. Besides, methinks Ministers may find Ways and Means, taking some leading, steady Persons along with them, to check such Inconveniencies, and put a Stop to them in their beginnings. However, there are many Instances to be found, of Places and Congregations where the People have been encouraged in these Respects without any Appearance of what this *Objection* aims at, but with a great and an agreeable Appearance of another kind. After all, supposing Inconveniencies cannot be intirely provided against, yet little Weaknesses, Imprudencies and Mistakes, will not be sufficient to set aside the Practice which Christians are here put upon. For Instance, if some Weakness and Imprudence should attend Family Instruction, certainly it is better it should be done poorly than not done at all. So likewise in encouraging Ordinances, and seconding the *Sermons* and Labours of Ministers, &c. And in Cases where more Prudence and Conduct is needful, if Care be taken, any great Mischief may be prevented.

2. There are *Objections* likewise on the Side of the People, who are to be helpful to their Ministers, and useful in the Congregation.

Some are for supposing it no Concern of theirs to be helpful thus to Ministers, and useful in the Congregation, that these Things lie out of the Limits of their Duty. — But, pray think again, and closely of this Matter; is it not your Duty to teach and instruct your Families, and lay them in the Way of Gospel Means? — To attend upon the Word and Ordinances of God, and to encourage them with your Families, and amongst others too? — Doth not it belong to you to second the Sermons and Labours of Ministers, by examining, encouraging, exhorting, or admonishing the *Souls* under your Care, according to what they hear from Time to Time? Is it not very needful, that a Minister should have knowledge of the State of your Families; how Religion stands amongst you? — Of the State of the Congregation and the Church, and the Members of it? Is not a good Understanding and brotherly Love, of Importance amongst Fellow-Worshippers and Fellow-Members? Is it not the express Duty of Christians to advise, encourage, exhort, admonish, comfort, and be helpful and useful to one another? But, “We shall bring upon our selves Ill-will hereby, and as the World goes, shall be branded with severe Names, Censures and Reproaches.” — This indeed shou’d put you upon Care and Watchfulness, that in what you do you may act with Sincerity and Uprightness, with Humility, Wisdom and Discretion: But this should not affright you from the Matter of your Duty, and what will redound very much to your Honour. The great God and your Saviour will be pleased with you; your Ministers, and the best Friends of Christ and Religion, will encourage and stand by you; and then you need not much mind or fear what others shall think or say of you. There are no Objections sufficient to hinder or excuse you, from endeavouring to make your selves helpful to Ministers, and useful in the Congregations and Churches you belong to.

C H A P. VI.

Heads of Caution, Advice and Direction.

AFTER all that has been said, concerning Christian Helpfulness and Usefulness, it is necessary to subjoin something by way of Caution, Advice and Direction, in order to point out to Christians, how they ought to manage and conduct themselves in the Way of Practice.

1. In this Business of being helpful and useful, *know your Strength and Ability, your Place and Character.*

In some Things this way the ordinary Understanding and Experience of Christians may be sufficient to direct and guide them; but as to several Branches of Christian Helpfulness and Usefulness, what I now mention is one of the most needful Things we have to learn, and one of the hardest to receive and conduct our selves by; so much footing has Pride, and a fond Opinion of our selves, got in corrupted Nature. Humbly and impartially then examine and consult your own Ability and Capacity, your Age, Experience, Place and Character, and manage accordingly. Where natural Parts and Gifts are of the lower Size, such shou'd not aim at or aspire after Things beyond their Reach. Where there is just Cause to acknowledge Things are too great, too nice and difficult, they should be declined by *such* as much as may be, and left to the more skilful and experienced. There is indeed, in some Christians of no mean Abilities and Attainments, such a Degree of Modesty, Humility, and Suspicion of themselves, that it is hard to bring them into Measures of being active and helpful; but such if they can be brought into the Way of it will commonly be found of considerable Service. And there may be *others*, whose Forwardness and Zeal shall much outrun their Abilities; and some Checks and Restraints may be proper here. It is often unhappy, where Christians busy themselves in such Things as are too high for them. Hence arise some of those Inconveniencies that are so often complained

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plained of, and laid to the Charge of our putting these Things into the Hands of Christians. It is good also to know our own peculiar *Weakness*; where we are most likely to slip and fail, and to keep a strict Guard upon our selves here. So a Regard is to be had to the several *Distinctions* amongst Men, natural or civil; as between Parents and Children, Masters and Servants; — and to the Difference which is often found in their religious Character; as between the elder and younger Ranks of Christians, and between the Weak and Unskilful, and the Strong and Experienced. So those who are of leading and honourable Characters, for Understanding, Experience, and eminent Attainments in Religion, are to have their Place and Regards accordingly. When Things are otherwise, and little or no Regard is had to the several Relations and Distinctions among Men, but every Thing is put upon one common *Level*, this tends to unhinge all Order and Harmony, and often occasions a great deal of Mischief. And therefore in the several Ways wherein Christians are to be helpful and useful, this is the *Rule*, *they are to act in Character*. And this should be observed, not only in such Things wherein Christians have to do one with another, but they should know their Place as to their Minister *that is set over them in the Lord*: It is unseemly and mischievous when it is otherwise. Congregations and Churches never look with a more pleasing and promising Aspect than when there is an Harmony among Ministers and People; when all are active and zealous in carrying on the Concerns of Religion, and yet maintain their several Places and Characters.

2. In being helpful and useful, *let it appear that you act with good and laudable Ends and Views, and with a Christian Spirit and Temper.*

The Apostle's Rule is, *Let nothing be done through Strife or Vain-glory, but in Lowliness of Mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every Man on his own Things, but every Man also on the Things of others*, Phil. ii. 3, 4. I am sorry there should be occasion to mention it; but there are Complainers up and down, that "many who are forward in such Things as these, betray so much Pride and Self-conceit; are morose and over-bearing, or act with a Spirit of Opposition, Strife and Ill-will, that they very much spoil what is aimed

" at

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"at hereby." Hence the Practice looks odd in the Eyes of many. — If this be true, as I am afraid it sometimes is, I am heartily grieved and ashamed, that so little of the true Christian Spirit should influence the Proceedings of such Persons. I could wish, that all who are to be helpful and useful, would make it appear, that they are acted by the noble, generous Spirit of the Gospel; that they are Persons of Sincerity and Uprightness, and what they do proceeds from a deep and tender Concern for the Glory of God and the Good of Souls. Thus in what you do to this Purpose in your Families let it appear to those about you, that all you say and do, comes from an hearty, tender Concern for their Souls. And if upon any great Occasions it be found needful to shew your Displeasure against any great Neglects or Faults of such as are under your Care, let not Wrath or Bitterness shew themselves; but at the same Time that you express your Dislike and Displeasure at the Offence, let all the pious Tenderness of your Souls flow forth towards the Party concerned. So in what is done farther as to others, either in the Affairs of the Congregation and Church, or of particular Persons and *Members*, let it appear that your Zeal is for the Glory of God, the Good and Welfare of those that are concerned, and the common Interest; and let Meekness, Love and Charity, always act their Parts here. Personal Disgusts or Resentments, Party-Views or Measures, should have no Place when you go about to be helpful and useful to Ministers or others. Thus if you make it appear that you act with good and laudable Ends and Views, little Mistakes, if they shou'd happen, will be pass'd by, you will best attain your End, and the Cause you are engaged in will escape the Censures which might otherwise happen.

3. Let your being helpful to your Minister, *be in a Way that shall be agreeable to him.*

What I now mention is not so much insisted upon from any such peculiar Power and Authority as is liberally conferred upon the Minister by some, but upon this evident Principle, that it is needful there should be an Harmony and an Agreement between a Minister and his People. A good Understanding there shou'd be, and all Affairs ought to be carried on and move in Agreement and Concord. Where it is otherwise, and *Minister and*
People

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People are very much for different Measures in Things that regard the Peace, good Order and Edification of Churches, they are certainly unhappily cast together. And therefore, I say, let your Measures of being helpful and useful be agreeable to your Minister: Take his Approbation along with you. In some Cases especially it should be thus, where Matters are of common and public Concernment; in some Things you should not proceed without him. And though in some others it may not always be necessary that you should first consult your Minister, yet act so as you have reason to believe will be agreeable to him and not disagreeable. Happy would it be for some Congregations and Churches if there was none of this; if Minister and People went hand in hand in Measures for the common Interest! Measures and Proceedings often depend pretty much upon the Things themselves that we are to have in hand; and are taken accordingly from the apprehended Use and Consequences of such Things; and therefore as there may be room for it sometimes, so it would be well if both sides, Minister and People, would abate a little of their Stiffness, and meet together in Measures prudently contrived for the common Interest, and Service of Religion.

4. In your acting this way, *let it be with Wisdom and Prudence.*

Prudence is an excellent Gift and Talent in a Minister. Amongst all his other Abilities this will wear a particular Lustre, and will render every Thing else in him the more taking and useful. And when Prudence enters into the Character of a private Christian, such an one becomes the more amiable and promising for Usefulness. Real Goodness, animated with an active Zeal, directed and governed by Wisdom and Prudence, can be no mean Character. Wisdom and Prudence are Companions in a near Alliance. *Prov. viii. 12. I Wisdom dwell with Prudence.* Wisdom and Prudence, together with the Ways and Means of doing Things, will consult Circumstances that lie here and there, Conveniencies and Inconveniencies, Difficulties and Dangers, and so direct the Course. *Prov. xxii. 3. A prudent Man foreseeth the Evil and hideth himself.* And not only the Circumstances of Things, but of Time and Place, and Persons concerned. As there is great room now for Prudence in the Things before us, so there is great need

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of it; something of it should run throughout with the Christian in his being helpful and useful, or Things will not be well done. It is an excellent Talent where Prudence has its Place and its Office, in the Education, Instruction, and Government of Families. Prudence is to be used in encouraging the Word and Ordinances, and in seconding the Minister's Labours. And when the Christian goes farther, and comes to have an Hand in the Affairs of the Congregation and Church, he is to be upon his Guard, and use all the Prudence he is Master of. It is plainly for want of some good Conduct that some well-designing Persons in aiming to be helpful and useful miss it so much, and by Imprudencies they commit, they give Occasion to those Complaints that are often fastened upon the Practice it self. Some have a particular Talent for wise and prudent Conduct; but ordinarily a Carriage and Conduct directed by Wisdom and Prudence is a rare as well as an excellent Qualification. However, we have Means and Helps for the Learning and Attaining of this. The careful Reading and Studying of the *Proverbs* of *Solomon* may be of excellent Use this way. Study human Nature in others, and observe the Workings of your own Hearts. In Prayer, remember earnestly to request it of God, to direct and guide your Steps. Where difficult Cases present themselves you may do well to advise with your Minister, or with others of Wisdom and Experience, about Management. Often review your own Steps and Conduct, and carefully observe where you have missed and failed, and be upon your Guard for the Future. And there is hardly any Thing that will be more helpful this way, than to take strict Notice of, and mark the Steps of such as are eminent for prudent Conduct and Management; for here Examples will do more than Precepts.

5. Guard against those Things that may hinder, or spoil Helpfulness and Usefulness.

Various Things of this Sort and Tendency might be pointed out. Whatever may give Persons a suspicious or a blemish'd Character; — as Spots and Stains upon Honesty and Justice, — if suspected of Falshood and Deceit, — Covetous to a great Degree, — careless and negligent in Christian Practice, — found now and then amongst the Friends of Excess and Drunkenness, &c. — So whatever

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favours very much of an ill Temper and Spirit ; if proud, haughty and over-bearing ; ill-natured, sour and morose ; keen at Resentments, full of Imprudencies, &c. Such Things as these will either very much cut Persons off from Opportunities of being helpful and useful, or spoil their attempting it. There is one Thing more too which Christians should particularly be warned and cautioned against ; and this is the Business of giving *Offence*. In many Places and Circumstances especially, I hardly know any Thing of more hurtful Consequence to the good Understanding, mutual Love, and even Edification of Societies, than the frequent Occasions of giving *Offence*. In this I am not singular, but I have along with me the Judgment of many of my wiser and more experienced *Brethren*. Many that are got into a generous Way of Thinking in other respects, and are greatly formed for Usefulness, yet their Generosity is greatly wanting, in not shewing a Tenderness, Compassion, and charitable Regard, and Conduct towards many of their Christian Brethren, who are not in the same Latitude of Thinking and Acting with themselves. By Liberties they take, in Talking, keeping Company, in Diversions, and other Things, they cut themselves off very much from being useful beyond their own Families. They occasion Uneasiness and Heart-burnings in many honest and well-meaning Christians, and create a Minister more Trouble than they design or are aware of. This is a Matter of ill Influence, and the Cause of heavy Complaints to many Ministers whose Hearts are *hot* within them to do good. I know it is often said, " Why do others take Offence at our Liberties, which we esteem innocent and lawful ? " Why, the Reason is plain, because their Consciences and yours have this difference ; they don't put them upon an innocent and harmless Footing as you do, but look upon them in a worse Light. Now, when the Case stands thus among Brethren, Christian Forbearance and Charity must have place. But, " Who must yield and forbear ? " Why, Duty and Conscience are seldom pleaded as obliging to these Liberties ; and therefore there must be abstaining on this side, out of regard to weak and tender Consciences, as the *Apostle* directs in the Controversy about eating Meats offered to *Idols* ; Rom. xv. 1. *The Strong must bear the Infirmit-
ties of the Weak*. Indeed, I would not altogether have weak, honest, well-meaning Persons, indulg'd in ground-
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less Fancies, Scruples and Superstitions, to the Hinderance of that Freedom and Liberty which we are not debarred of, either as Men or Christians. The Matter then, as I apprehend, must rest here; Christians must abstain from all such Liberties as only regard indifferent Things, when they would occasion great Offence. But then, let them bear a Sort of Testimony at the same Time, against the groundless Fancies and Scruples of others, by letting them understand, that it is out of Tenderness, and brotherly Kindness towards them, and not from any apprehended Unlawfulness in the Things themselves that they abstain*. By this Method Persons will at once bear their Testimony for Liberty, and manifest their Christian Forbearance and Charity: And for my Part, I must call this a noble and commendable Piece of Self-Denial, and Tenderness towards our Christian Brethren. I can't but think too, that this looks like the most effectual Way of bringing Persons off from many of those little Scruples and Fancies that are complained of.

Under such Cautions and Directions as these now, it is, that the Practice I have here stated and recommended should be received and conducted. I have nothing more to add; but only to leave the Whole with the Reader, and in those *blessed Hands* that must make every Attempt for the Good of Souls, and the Cause of Religion, successful.

* See Dr. Watt's Sermon of a good Report, Vol. II. p. 429.

F I N I S.



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